

NOTES ON SOME EPISODES CONCERNING THE RELATIONS
BETWEEN THE ARABS AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE
FROM THE FOURTH TO THE SIXTH CENTURY

ALEXANDER A. VASILIEV

Le regretté A. Vasiliev, que la mort a surpris au moment où il était en train de préparer un ouvrage sur l'histoire des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes au début de l'Islam, pour lequel il avait déjà rassemblé des matériaux, avait projeté d'écrire comme introduction à cette histoire un chapitre sur l'Arabie préislamique dans ses rapports avec le monde romano-byzantin. Il avait rédigé une ébauche préparatoire de ce chapitre, fragmentaire et incomplète à divers points de vue. Un certain nombre de pages, relatives à quelques aspects de ces rapports pendant les IV^e, V^e, et VI^e siècles de notre ère, en particulier aux contacts entre les Bédouins et les Chrétiens établis dans les territoires frontières de l'empire, et dans lesquelles le maître passait en revue et analysait avec sa minutie et son acribie coutumières les informations fournies par les sources, notamment hagiographiques, ont paru dignes d'être publiées. Bien qu'elles ne soient pas définitives et qu'elles eussent certainement subi des remaniements de l'auteur, nous les publions telles qu'elles ont été trouvées dans le brouillon de ce chapitre, dans l'espoir qu'elles pourront être utiles par la collection de renseignements qu'elles apportent pour l'histoire du Proche-Orient.

M. Canard

DURING the early period of legalized Christianity, beginning with the fourth century, the Arabs of the Syrian desert did not limit themselves to their internecine feuds, or to raiding and marauding the Syrian region and harassing its settled inhabitants. They were sometimes in touch with the Christian elements of the country on friendly, peaceable terms, and even took part, with the imperial troops, in military expeditions in the Near East, siding with the Romans against the Persians, but often proving to be unreliable and treacherous allies.

A characteristic example of such participation by the Arabs in Roman expeditions may be found in the Persian campaign of the Emperor Julian (361–363). According to Ammianus Marcellinus, “after having received the auxiliaries from the Saracens, which they offered him with great willingness, the emperor marched at quick step to Cersucium, a very safe and skillfully built

fortress.”¹ But later, when the Saracen nomads realized that Julian’s expedition had met with disaster, and that the survivors, after the Emperor’s death, were fighting their way back with great difficulty, the Saracens changed their minds and became very troublesome foes of the Romans. The same Ammianus Marcellinus writes: “Our horses were tired, and their riders, who marched on foot and fell to the rear, were surrounded by a throng of Saracens, and would at once have perished, had not some squadrons of our light-armed cavalry brought help to them in their distress.” Then the Roman historian tries to explain such treacherous behaviour by the Saracens. “We found these Saracens hostile,” he says, “for the reason that they had been prevented by Julian’s order from receiving, as in times past, numerous gifts and pay.”²

After Julian’s death the Saracens continued to play an important role in Rolfe has translated “the auxiliaries of the Scythians.”

¹ Amm. Marcell., 23, 5, 1: *Adscitis Saracenorum auxiliis, quae animis obtulere promptissimis*. Loeb Library ed., and transl., John C. Rolfe, II (1937) 332–334. Through oversight

² *Ibid.*, 23, 25, 6. Loeb, II, 523–528. Cf. also A. Musil, *Kuşejr ‘Amra* I, 130.

the Roman expeditions in the Near East, but, as before, the Romans could not rely upon their fidelity. About the year 376, the Emperor Valens was at Antioch. According to our sources, the Saracens were allied at that time with the Romans. But as soon as the Emperor left Antioch, they revolted against him under the leadership of their Queen Mavia, whose husband was dead and who was herself a Christian. Her troops successfully invaded Roman territory, and the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen, referring to her success, pointed out that "this war was by no means a contemptible one, although conducted by a woman." The Roman leaders wanted to make peace with the Queen, who promised to end the war on condition that a certain person named Moses, by birth a Saracen, famed for his piety, faith, and miracles, be made bishop over her people. The Romans, regarding a peace established on such terms as extremely advantageous, decided to grant Mavia's demand; Moses received ordination and this put an end to the Saracen war. Mavia's suc-

cessful campaign, writes the same historian, "is still held in remembrance among the people of the country, and is celebrated in songs by the Saracens [*παρὰ δὲ Σαρακηνοῖς ἐν ᾠδαῖς ἐστὶν*]." After receiving ordination, Moses exercised the functions of his new office among the Saracens, and converted many of them to the faith. Mavia observed the peace, and gave her daughter in marriage to Victor, the commander-in-chief of the Roman army.³

About the year 373, in all probability, the Saracens appeared unexpectedly at Sinai, and attacked and massacred many hermits who lived there.⁴ This attack was evidently but one of many to follow.

At that time, the primitive dwellings of the hermits of Sinai were not protected against such incursions, and the pilgrims who visited Sinai were also exposed to the danger of being molested or even massacred by the nomads. The numerous complaints of the hermits finally reached Constantinople, and in the sixth century, at the time of Justinian the Great, a new structure combining a

³ Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI, 38. Migne, P.G., LXVII, coll. 1408-1413. In English, *Bohn's Ecclesiastical Library* (London, 1855) 307-310. See also Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 36. P.G., LXVII, coll. 556-557 (almost identical with Sozomen). In English, *ibid.* (London, 1853) 257-258. Theodoretus, episcopus Cyrensis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 20 (21). P.G., LXXXII, col. 1181; Theodoret, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Léon Parmentier, IV (Leipzig, 1911) 23 (p. 261). Brief account. Rufinus, *Hist. ecclesiastica*, II, 6; P.L., XXI, coll. 514-515, caput VI: *De Moyse, quem Regina Sarracenorum gentis suae poposcit Episcopum*. Theophanes, ed. de Boor, I, 64⁵⁻¹⁶; *Anastasii Historia Tripartita*, de Boor, 93. Brief account. Georgius Monachus, ed. de Boor, II, 555 (Muralt, 457); P.G., CX, coll. 681-684: *Μαβίας, ὁ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βασιλεὺς, Χριστιανὸς ἦν ἐκ γένους Ῥωμαίων* (col. 681). In Old-Slavonic, V. Istrin, *The Chronicle of George Hamartolus in an Old Slavo-Russian Translation*, I (Petrograd, 1920) 369 (Maviya — the Queen). Nicephori Callisti, *Ecclesiastica Historia*, XL, 46. P.G., CXLVI, coll. 732-738. Usual detailed story. Michel le Syrien, I, 294, 303. "Chronicon Iacobi Edesseni," CSCO, *Scr. Syri*, ser. 3, versio, t. IV (1905) 223 (brief fragmentary notice). See A. Couret, *La Palestine sous les empereurs grecs*,

326-636 (Grenoble, 1869) 73-74. A. Figaniol, *L'Empire chrétien*, 325-395 (Paris, 1947) 158, 169, n. 102. R. Devreesse, "Le christianisme dans la péninsule sinaïtique, des origines à l'arrivée des Musulmans," *Revue biblique*, XLIX (1940) 205-206. Musil, *Kuṣejr 'Amra*, I, 130.

⁴ A very detailed account on this attack, including legendary elements, had been attributed formerly to St. Nilus of Ancyra (died ca. A.D. 430), who had been erroneously called Nilus Sinaita. The account is included in the *Narrationes de clade monachorum in monte Sinai*, attributed to him, namely in *Narratio IV*, P.G., LXXIX, coll. 625-640. But since then it has been proved that this work does not belong to Nilus, and is a kind of romance by an unknown author, based on the real historical fact of the attack. Another spurious account of the same attack, by the monk Ammonius, *De sanctis patribus barbarorum incursione in monte Sina et Raithu peremptis*, has no historical value either. See O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, IV (1924) 165-166. R. Devreesse, "Le christianisme dans la péninsule sinaïtique, des origines à l'arrivée des Musulmans," *Revue biblique*, XLIX (1940) 216-222. B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (Freiburg, 1950) 291, 3. In 1869 A. Couret, *op. cit.*, 92-93, used these texts as authentic valuable sources.

monastery and a fortified place against the "Arab-Ismaelites" was erected. It is in this form that the Sinai monastery of Saint Catherine exists today.⁵

John Cassian, monk and ascetic writer from southern Gaul, who spent several years in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Constantinople (ca. 360–ca. 435), says in his *Collationes*, a work which has sometimes been called *Speculum Monasticum*, that, at the beginning of the fifth century, the Saracens made an incursion into Palestine and, at Thecue, the native place of the Hebrew prophet Amos (Amos I:1), massacred a great number of hermits.⁶

Palladius, who compiled the so-called *Lausiaca History*, the chief document dealing with early Christian monachism in Egypt, lived about this same time, having been born in 367 in Galatia. Although he spent some time in Palestine, among other places, his *History*, written in 420, fails to supply us with any information about Saracen incursions there. Egypt itself, before the seventh century, had not been molested by the Arabs, whose activities had been limited principally to the territory north of the peninsula.⁷

The celebrated Saint Jerome (347–419/420) mentions some Saracen incursions in his works. One of his letters, written in the fatal year 410 when the capture and sack of Rome by Alaric pro-

foundly shocked the Christian world, begins: "I have long wished to attack the prophecies of Ezekiel and to make good the promises I have so often given curious readers. When, however, I began to dictate I was so confounded by the havoc wrought in the West, and, above all, by the sack of Rome that, as the common saying has it, I forgot even my own name. Long did I remain silent, knowing that it was a time to weep [Ecclesiastes 3:4]." After this moving introduction Saint Jerome proceeds: "And in this year, when I had commented the three books [of Ezekiel], a sudden attack of the barbarians, of whom thy Virgilius says *lateque vagantes Barcoei* [Aeneid, IV, 42–43: and Barcoeans, raging far and near], and the Holy Scripture of Ishmaël *contra faciem omnium fratrum suorum habitabit* [Gen. 16:12: and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren], runs through the limits of Egypt, Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria like a torrent which drags along everything, so that by the mercy of Christ we ourselves were hardly able to escape their hands."⁸

Then, in the preface to Book III of his Commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome writes: "Who would believe that Rome, built up by the conquest of the whole world, would become both the mother and the tomb of her people; that all the shores of the Orient, Egypt, and Africa which once belonged to the ruling city would be filled with a host of slaves and

⁵ "Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales," CSCO, ser. 3, t. VI, pt. 1, ed. L. Cheikho S. J. (Beyrouth-Paris, 1906) 202^{a-22}–204^{a-3}. Detailed account in Arabic. Latin translation in Migne, P.G., CXI, coll. 1071–1072. See O. Blau, "Arabien im sechsten Jahrhundert. Eine ethnographische Skizze," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, XXIII (1869) 565.

⁶ Joannis Cassiani *Collatio VI, caput I: In Palaestinae partibus juxta Thecue vicum, qui Amos prophetam meruit procreare, solitudo vastissima est usque ad Arabiam ac mare Mortuum . . . in hac summae vitae ac sanctitatis monachi diutissime conmorantes repente sunt a discurrentibus Saracenorum latrunculis interempti*. P.L. XLIX, coll. 643–645; CSEL,

XIII, 2, *Johannis Cassiani Collationes*, XXVIII, recensuit M. Petschenig (Vienna, 1886) 153. On Cassianus' biography and his works, as well as a very detailed bibliography, see O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, IV (Freiburg-in-Breisgau, 1924) 558–564. B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (1950) 401–403.

⁷ See Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1904).

⁸ *Hoc autem anno cum tres explicassem libros, subitus impetus barbarorum . . . Aegypti limitem, Palaestinae, Phoenicis, Syriae percurrit ad instar torrentis cuncta secum trahens, ut vix manus eorum misericordia Christi potuerimus evadere*. S. Eusebii Hieronymi *epistola CXXVI*, Migne, P.L., XXII, col. 1086. CSEL, LVI (Vienna-Leipzig, 1918) 144.

maid-servants; that the Holy Bethlehem which once fostered nobles of both sexes and men endowed with all kinds of wealth would foster daily beggars?"⁹

The information Jerome gives us is rather general in character, but one detail should be emphasized: among the places invaded by "the barbarians" he mentions Egypt and even Africa, regions not given in other sources. It may be pointed out that Jerome fails to tell us specifically who were his "barbarians." They must have been the Saracens if we take into account his reference to Genesis 16:15, where it is said that "Abraham called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmaël." I think the mention of Egypt and Africa must be attributed to Jerome's rhetorical exaggeration.

Sometimes our fragmentary sources refer to Bedouin incursions to the north of the Syrian desert, in Mesopotamia.¹⁰

As pointed out above, after Christianity, in the fourth century, had been recognized in the Roman Empire as a legal religion, it began to spread among the population of Syria and in the Syrian desert.¹¹ For our study the hagiographic material casts clear light on the new re-

ligious conditions which made their appearance following the new trend of the central imperial government. The Lives of the Syro-Palestinian Saints are of primary importance in this respect, because, in spite of their exaggerations and unavoidable miraculous element, they clearly reveal the existing fact that, in the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs formed the principal part of the local population, and that most of them gradually became Christians.

The various attempts to deal with the religious problems in the fourth and fifth centuries which characterized the turbulent religious life of the Empire, and which were ardently discussed at the first four Oecumenical Councils, naturally had certain repercussions in the Eastern provinces. The Arabs were in close touch with the representatives of different doctrines; with the Malkites – the adherents of the state church in that period, with the Nestorians, and the Monophysites (Jacobites). The two latter doctrines were most generally accepted by the Arabs; nestorianism in the east, on the Persian side, and monophysitism in the west, on the Byzantine side.¹² The Mal-

⁹ . . . *ut tota Orientis, Aegypti, Africae littora olim dominatricis urbis, servorum et ancillarum numero complerentur; ut quotidie sancta Bethleem, nobiles quondam utriusque sexus, atque omnibus divitiis affluentes, susciperet mendicantes?* S. Eusebii Hieronymi *Commentariorum in Ezechielem*, lib. III, *praefatio*, Migne, P.L., XXV, col. 75.

¹⁰ For example, the Syriac Chronicle of Arbela, which was compiled in the sixth century, relates that the region of Adiabene, in North Mesopotamia, where Arbela was the chief town and bishopric, was devastated by the looting Bedouins, and that, during one of their incursions, the bishop of Arbela, Rehima (430-450) was abducted and kept in captivity for more than fifteen years. See Eduard Sachau, "Die Chronik von Arbela. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des ältesten Christentums im Orient," *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin), Jahrgang 1915, *Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, no. 6, pp. 30 and 85. This earliest piece of Syriac historical literature, a kind of *Liber Pontificalis* of the metropolis Arbela, had first been edited and translated into French, in 1907, by a Dominican, A. Mingana, professor at a Seminary in Mosul on the Tigris.

The name of the author of the Chronicle is Meschikha-Sekha, or Mešikha-zekha, i.e. the Messiah has vanquished. The Chronicle covers the period from 100-540 (or 551); it lists more than twenty bishops of Arbela, and deals with the spread of Eastern Christianity at about A.D. 224, to wit, at the moment of the transition of power from the Arsacids to the Sassanids. I use here Sachau's more recent edition and his German translation. On the Chronicle see A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922) 134-135. J.-B. Chabot, *La littérature syriaque* (Paris, 1934) 56-57 (he erroneously dates Sachau's work in 1908 instead of in 1915).

¹¹ R. Dussaud and F. Macler, during their expedition in the Syrian desert, found in many places the remains of churches and monasteries, Christian inscriptions and crosses. *Voyage archéologique au Šafâ et dans le Džebel ed = Drâz* (Paris, 1901). See also F. Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII^e au VIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1933) 94.

¹² But there were also Monophysites in the eastern regions; see J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide* (Paris, 1904).

kite doctrine took hold in such monasteries as that of St. Catherine of Sinai, in the lavras of St. Euthymius, St. Sabas, and some others, and in numerous hermitages scattered throughout these regions.

It is difficult to believe that the Arabs, who were not interested in the subtleties of the different Christian doctrines, could easily have discriminated among them. The conversion of the Arabs was effected and stimulated not so much by religious causes as by practical considerations for their economic "wellbeing," as they conceived it in their primitive minds. If they were in contact with monks and priests, the monks, in their turn, to quote one author, "were accustomed to attend the Arab fairs where they talked about religion to those who were disposed to listen."¹³

The most celebrated champions of Christian faith in Palestine in that period, among others of lesser renown, were St. Euthymius "the Great" (377–473) and St. Sabas (439–531). Both, and particularly Euthymius, were in very close relationship with the Arabs, whom they called Saracens, and in their Lives, compiled by the famous hagiographer of the sixth century, Cyril of Scythopolis, are preserved the facts and episodes that provide us with many in-

teresting data in regard to the pre-Islamic age.

According to the Life of St. Euthymius, he erected, about 428, a lavra near Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho.¹⁴ After converting many Arabs — the "one-time wolves of Arabia who became the members of the spiritual flock of Christ" — (τῆς λογικῆς ποίμνης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, xv, 24), Euthymius organized the *Parembolḗ* (παρεμβολή, παρεμβολαί), a settlement (originally a camp, an enclosure) for the converted Saracens, which was situated three hours east of Jerusalem.¹⁵ The most celebrated convert was the chief of a Saracen tribe and phylarch Aspebetos (Ἀσπέβετος),¹⁶ who took the name of Peter after his conversion. At the request of Euthymius he was appointed by the Bishop of Jerusalem, Juvenal, to be the first bishop of the Saracens, especially for the *Parembolḗ*. On his way to Ephesus to attend the Oecumenical Council (431), Juvenal was escorted by several bishops; among them was the bishop of the *Parembolḗ*, Peter, whose signature is found with those of the other members of the Council who ratified its decrees.¹⁷ One of the Palestinian anchorites, Euthymius' disciple, Elias, who was an Arab by birth, became the Patriarch of Jerusalem (494–517).¹⁸

¹³ De Lacy O'Leary, *Arabia before Muhammad* (New York, 1927) 142.

¹⁴ For the most recent edition of the Life of St. Euthymius see Eduard Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig, 1939) 3–85. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, XLIX, 2. See also R. Génier, *Vie de Saint Euthyme le Grand* (Paris, 1909).

¹⁵ The location of the *Parembolḗ* has been identified by Féderlin, the Superior of St. Anne in Jerusalem. Originally printed in the magazine *La Terre Sainte*, XXIV (June, 1907), his detailed description of the remains of this settlement has been reproduced in its entirety by Génier, *op. cit.*, 104–110 (with two illustrations). See H. Charles, *Le christianisme des Arabes nomades* (Paris, 1936) 41–42.

¹⁶ Aspebetos is the Persian title *spahbedh*, a commander-in-chief. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber* (Leyden, 1879) 96, n. 2. Ed. Schwartz, *op. cit.*, 259. A. Christen-

sen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen, 1944) 519. See Génier, *op. cit.*, 102–103 (he fails to explain the name of Aspebetos).

¹⁷ *Vita Euthymii*, XV, 25: Πέτρος τῶν Παρεμβολῶν ἐπίσκοπος. *Symeonis Metaphrastae Vita S. Euthymii*, Migne, P.G., CXIV, col. 641: Πέτρω τῷ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπισκόπῳ. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, ed. Edvardus Schwartz, t. I, vol. I, pt. 7 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1929): *Concilium Universale Ephesenum*, p. 85₂₈: Πέτρου Παρεμβολῆς; p. 115₁₂₈: Πέτρος ἐπίσκοπος Παρεμβολῶν ὑπέγραψα. See E. Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950) 218, 221; the complete article, 209–279.

¹⁸ *Vita Euthymii*, ed. E. Schwartz, 51₄₋₅: ὁ δὲ Ἠλίας μὲν ὠνομάζετο, τῆς δὲ Ἀραβίας ὑπήρχεν. See R. Génier, "Un Arabe Patriarche de Jérusalem, Saint-Elie," *Conférences de Saint-Etienne*, 1909–10 (Paris, 1910) 288; Charles, *op. cit.*, 44. Elias was deposed and exiled in 517 for his defense of the Council of Chalcedon, and died in

Another celebrated Palestinian anchorite was St. Sabas who, in 478, founded the Great Lavra on the Kedron. Since such foundations were sometimes subject to the incursions of pagan nomadic Bedouins, they were erected like fortresses so as to be able to beat off the assaults. The Lavra of St. Sabas even today looks like a fortress.

Sabas' Life, compiled by Cyril of Scythopolis,¹⁹ fails to provide us with any facts concerning Arab attacks against the monastery during his time (439–531). But it states that, when he visited Constantinople, Sabas addressed to the Emperor Anastasius (491–518), among other requests, a demand for the construction of a fortified place (κάστρον) in the desert, near his monasteries, in order to protect them against the Saracen incursions; and the Emperor, granting his demand, ordered that the castle be built and a military garrison be put in it. Evidently, however, the imperial order was not carried out.²⁰

518. According to the Archbishop Sergius, Elias as Patriarch was Elias the Second, while Le Quien designates him as Elias the First. Arch. Sergius, *The Complete Liturgical Calendar (Menologion) of the Orient*, 2nd ed., II, 2 (Vladimir, 1901) 629 (in Russian). Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, III, 176.

¹⁹ The Life of St. Sabas was first published by J. B. Cotelier, *Ecclesiae graecae monumenta*, III (Paris, 1686) 220–376. J. Pomialovsky reproduced Cotelier's Greek text, and published an old Russian version of the Life (St. Petersburg, 1890). I have used the recent edition by Eduard Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Leipzig, 1939) 85–200. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, XLIX, 2. A sketch of Sabas' life and activities by Schwartz, *op. cit.*, 379 ff. See the most recent, very fine and detailed article on St. Sabas by H. Leclercq, in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, XV, 1 (Paris, 1950) coll. 189–211.

²⁰ *The Life*, § 72 (p. 175): διὰ τὴν τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἐπιδρομὴν . . . κάστρον οἰκοδομήσαι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ παρὰ κάτω τῶν διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς μετρίότητος συστάτων μοναστηρίων, § 73 (p. 178), § 83 (p. 188): καὶ οὕτως ἐκωλύθη ἡ τοῦ κάστρου οἰκοδομή.

²¹ *The Life*, § 13 (p. 96); See also § 14 (p. 97); § 15 (pp. 98–99); § 81 (p. 186). See V. Chapot, *La frontière de l'Euphrate* (Paris, 1907) 33, n. 4; 34.

In Sabas' Life we find some edifying episodes indicative of good relations between him and the Saracens. One day, for instance, Sabas, meeting four hungry Saracens, shared with them the little food he had in his sheepskin coat (μηλωτάριον), and, a few days later, the grateful Saracens brought him in return bread, cheese, and dates.²¹

Our sources give us a most interesting account of the events which occurred in the monastery of St. Symeon Stylites. The Arabs, having been told about the festival which took place in the monastery of St. Simeon Stylites the Elder (died 459), in the region northeast of Antioch, descended suddenly upon the place and seized a great number of men, women, youths and girls. Michael the Syrian, who tells the story, concludes it in edifying style, writing that "the Christians remained in despair; some of them said: 'Why does God allow this to happen?' But for him who is intelligent, Justice has allowed this to happen because,

Many years after Sabas' death, his lavra endured a devastating Arab assault which took place in 614, just a week before the capture of Jerusalem by the Persians. The Arabs, taking advantage of the general consternation caused by the approach of the Persian troops, attacked the lavra by surprise, and mercilessly massacred the monks who were still there; the majority of the monks succeeded in escaping this violent death by fleeing in time beyond the Jordan. We have an account of the massacre by an eye witness, Antiochus, monk of Mar-Sabas. *Epistola Antiochi Monachi Laurae Sabae Abbatis ad Eustathium praepositum monasterii Attalinae*. Migne, P.G., LXXXIX, col. 1423: ἐπελθόντων γὰρ τῶν Ἰσραηλιτῶν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ Λαύρᾳ πρὸ μιᾶς ἐβδομάδας τοῦ παραληφθῆναι τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν, καὶ πάντα τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἱερὰ σκεύη διαρπασάντων, τὸ μὲν μλῆθος τῶν Πατέρων παραχρῆμα ὑμανχώρησεν. . . . On the massacre of 614, see S. Vailhé, "Le monastère de Saint-Sabas," *Echos d'Orient*, III (1899–1900) 20. Vailhé's text is reproduced in its entirety by Leclercq, *op. cit.*, coll. 197–198. See Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens*, 37. The orthodox liturgical calendar under May 15 mentions the commemoration of "The Fathers massacred at the monastery of St. Sabas." Arch. Sergius, *The Complete Liturgical Calendar (Menologion) of the Orient*, 2nd ed. II, 1 (Vladimir, 1901) 144 (in Russian).

instead of fasting, vigilance, and psalmody during the celebrations of the feasts of the martyrs, the Christians have given themselves to intemperance, drunkenness, dancing, and other sorts of lust and debauchery, and have irritated God. And on this account, He has justly struck us and chastised us in order that we might improve.”²² The edifying section of this text alludes to the very well known fact that the celebrations connected with monasteries, churches and other sanctuaries were almost always accompanied by popular fairs where the people had many kinds of entertainment entirely unrelated to the real subject and purpose of the celebration.

But at the same time, the same Stylite, whose fame spread far beyond the limits of the eastern provinces and reached western Europe as far as Spain, Britain, and Gaul, was held in high honour among the Arabs. Theodoret of Cyrus, after mentioning the conversion, by Symeon, of many pagan Arabs, vividly describes, as an eyewitness, a large tumultuous crowd of Arabs seeking Symeon's blessing. The latter, seeing that the crowd was too large to be blessed by him from the top of his pillar, announced that, in his stead, Theodoret would give them the benediction.

Theodoret proceeds: “They rushed like barbarians, some drawing me forward, some backward, some to the right and some to the left; those further away climbed up on the others, stretched their hands, drew me by the beard, grasped at my clothes. And they would have suf-

focated me by their disorderly attack had not the Saint, by his loud cry, succeeded in dispersing them.” On another occasion Symeon, seeing a violent dispute between two tribes who wanted his blessing, had to intervene energetically, threatening them and calling them dogs; finally, with great difficulty, he succeeded in stopping the quarrel.²³

Symeon's disciple Antonius, who compiled his Life, mentions the conversion of many Saracens, among them “the King of the Saracens” (τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Σαρακηνῶν) evidently an Arab chief or phylarch. After Symeon's death, the Saracens came armed, and with camels, wishing to take away (ἀρπάζειν) the body of the Saint.²⁴

An episode which reminds us of the story of Symeon Stylites is told in the Life of Peter the Iberian who lived in the second half of the fifth century (*ca.* 477). This Life has survived in a Syriac translation from the lost Greek original which was compiled about the year 500. At one time, when weak and sick, Peter made use of the warm springs in the place called Livias, not far from Madaba, in an effort to alleviate his pains. As soon as the neighboring Arabs heard of the arrival of the Saint, they rushed in great numbers to this city, seeking his blessing, and hoping to obtain relief from their suffering. And, when Peter, disappointed in the effectiveness of the waters, decided to go elsewhere, the Arabs thoughtfully suggested another place, Ba'ar, also famous for its warm springs. Peter, following their sugges-

²² *Michel le Syrien*, ed. Chabot, II (Paris, 1904) 422.

²³ *Theodoret's Episcopi Cyrensis Religiosa Historia*. Migne, P.G., LXXXII, col. 1476; *Das Leben des Heiligen Symeon Stylites*, ed. H. Lietzmann (Leipzig, 1908) 10–11. See H. Delehaye, *Les Saints Stylites* (Brussels-Paris, 1923) p. XXXII. P. Peeters, “Un Saint hellénisé par annexion: Syméon Stylite,” *Orient et Byzance, Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Brussels, 1950) 105–106, *Subsidia Hagiographica*, 26. This is the revised and corrected article which originally came out in *Analecta*

Bollandiana, LXI (1943) 29–71, under the title “S. Syméon Stylite et ses premiers biographes.” Saint Symeon was born at Sisan, or Sis, a hamlet on the border between Syria and Cilicia, near Nicopolis. Hitti says that Symeon himself was an Arab. *History of the Arabs* (London, 1937) 82.

²⁴ See Antonius, *Das Leben des Heiligen Symeon*, ed. H. Lietzmann (Leipzig, 1908) 42 (§ 17): conversion of the Saracens; p. 44 (§ 18): conversion τοῦ βασιλέως τῶν Σαρακηνῶν; p. 68 (§ 29): the Saracens came ἐν ὄπλοις μετὰ καμήλων βουλόμενοι ἀρπάσαι τὸ λείψανον. This Life

tion, went to this place, *via* Madaba and the Holy Mountain of Moses, that is Mount Nebo.²⁵

An interesting episode occurred in 473, which has come down to us in one of the fragments from the work of the historian of the end of the fifth century, Malchus of Philadelphia.²⁶ A Persian adventurer, of Arab origin, Amorcesos,²⁷ who "whether because he was not successful in Persia, or for some other reason, preferred Roman territory," left Persia and settled in the neighboring region of Arabia. There he lived as a brigand, making raids, not on the Romans (προνομῶς ἐποιεῖτο καὶ πολέμους Ῥωμαίων μὲν οὐδενί), but on the Saracens. His power grew, and finally he succeeded in seizing the small island at the mouth of the gulf of Akaba, Iotabe, identified with the rocky island of Tiran of our own day, upon which the Byzantine government had established a customhouse to control commercial shipping to Clysma (near modern Suez) and Akaba (Aila), at the tip of the Gulf of Akaba on the Aelanitic Gulf. Amorcesos drove out the Greek customhouse officers, amassed a considerable fortune by collecting dues, occupied other places in the neighborhood, and conceived the idea of becoming a phylarch of the Saracens of Arabia Petraea, who were dependent upon the Romans. He sent Peter, an ecclesiastic, or, as Malchus says, "a bishop of his people" (ἐπίσκοπον τῆς φυλῆς τῆς αὐτοῦ), to Emperor Leo (457-474) to negotiate the matter. The Emperor gave favorable consideration to Amorcesos' demand, and even expressed his desire to have a personal interview

with him. When Amorcesos came to Constantinople he received all sorts of honors. He shared the imperial table, was admitted to assemblies of the Senate, and "bitterest offence to the Romans," he was even given precedence over the patricians. All these privileges were accorded him because he was persuaded to become a Christian (Χριστιανὸς ἀνεπίσθη γενέσθαι). On his departure Leo gave him a very valuable picture, perhaps an icon adorned with gold and precious stones (εἰκόνα τινα χρυσήν καὶ κατάλιθον), and compelled the Senators also to present him with gifts; and, in addition, transferred to him possession not only of Iotabe, but of many other places. In accordance with his wish, the title of phylarch was granted him (τῶν φυλῶν ἄρχοντα). It is interesting to note the reaction of the Byzantines to the privileges extended a foreign adventurer; they were scandalized that these privileges should be accorded, as Bury says (II, 8), to a fire-worshipper. Leo was also criticised for permitting the foreigner to see the towns, through which he had to travel, unarmed and defenseless (τρυφῆς μόνον γεμούσας). The empire regained Iotabe in 498, under Anastasius.²⁸

Sometimes the Arabs who were on the Persian side passed over to the Greek side. Thus, in A.D. 502-503, a certain Arab, 'Adid, who had been under the rule of the Persians, surrendered with all his troops and became a subject of the Greeks. The Greek Arabs too crossed over without orders into the Persian territory, and took captives; once they even plundered the city of Hirah, the capital

was first published by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, in his *Συλλογὴ Παλαιστίνης καὶ Συριακῆς Ἀγιολογίας*, with a Russian translation by V. Latychev, *Pravoslavny Palestinsky Sbornik*, t. 57 (St. Petersburg, 1907). See H. Charles, *op. cit.*, 36-37. According to P. Peeters, Antonius has no authority whatever as a source. Peeters, *op. cit.*, 107-112.

²⁵ *Petrus der Iberer*. Ein Charakterbild zur Kirchen- und Sittengeschichte des fünften Jahrhunderts. Syrische Uebersetzung einer um das Jahr 500 verfassten griechischen Biographie.

Herausgegeben und übersetzt von Richard Raabe (Leipzig, 1895) 82-87.

²⁶ *Malchi Philadelphensis Fragmenta*, fr. 1, ed. Bonn, 231-234; C. Müller, *FHG*, IV, 113. See Bury, II, 8. Kulakovsky, I, 2nd ed., 380-381 (in Russian). F.-M. Abel, "L'île de Iotabe," *Revue biblique*, XLVII (1938) 526-527. A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 365-366.

²⁷ Tillemont calls Amorcesos "Sarrazin sujet des Perses," Le Nain de Tillemont, *Histoire des Empereurs*, VI (Paris, 1738) 417-418.

²⁸ Theophanes, A.M. 5990; de Boor, 141.

of the Persian Arabs. And it should be remembered that this war was in general a source of great profit to the Arabs of both sides, for, as a Syrian writer says, they sometimes imposed their will upon both kingdoms, Byzantium and Persia.²⁹

Sometimes pagan Arabs insulted the Christians. In 523, the Emperor Justin I sent an embassy to negotiate peace with the Lakhmid chief, al-Mundhir, who, being a vassal of the Persian king had made two devastating inroads into Byzantine territory. When the envoys arrived at the encampment where al-Mundhir resided, some pagan Arabs met them with insults, saying, "What can you do, for behold, your Christ has been expelled by the Romans and by the Persians and by the Himyarites?" And Symeon, bishop of Beth-Arsham, in his letter remarks: "And when we were insulted by the Saracens it distressed us."³⁰

It is interesting to point out that the Arabs had their favorite saints. Among them was St. Sergius, who had endured martyrdom in the fourth century, under Maximian. His cult was widespread among the Arabs, and his sanctuary at Resapha, in Northern Mesopotamia, was

one of the most important pilgrimage centers.³¹ According to Procopius, there was, in Euphratesia, a church dedicated to Sergius, a famous saint whom men of earlier times worshipped and revered, and for whom they named the place Sergiopolis.³² The same author supplies us with the information that the Saracens attacked the sanctuary for plunder. He says the Romans surrounded the city with a very modest wall, sufficient only to prevent the Saracens of the region from capturing the city by storm, for the Saracens were apparently incapable of storming a wall. At a later time, in the sixth century, Justinian realizing that the sanctuary, through its acquisition of treasures, had come to be powerful and celebrated, promptly gave it his careful consideration, and surrounded the church with a most remarkable wall, etc.³³ On the other hand, the historian Theophylactes Simocatta states that the nomad Arabs worshipped the martyr Sergius.³⁴

The monophysite Patriarch of Antioch, Severus (512–518), dedicated one of his homilies, which he delivered at Qinnasrin, to the memory of St. Sergius. He says that the nomads, "escaping with

²⁹ *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, composed in Syriac A.D. 507, with notes and a translation into English by W. Wright (Cambridge, 1882) 61 (chap. LXXV), 64 (chap. LXXIX), 70 (chap. LXXXVIII).

³⁰ I. Guidi, "La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêth Aršam sopra i martiri omeriti," *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, CCLXXVIII (1880–1881) ser. 3, VII (Rome, 1881) 481. This letter has been reproduced, in one form or another, by several Syrian historians. See A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950) 278–280.

³¹ The Greek text of St. Sergius' *Vita*, ed. by I. Van den Gheyn, "Passio antiquior SS. Sergii et Bacchi, graece nunc primum edita," *Analecta Bollandiana*, XIV (1895), 373–395; p. 395 (§ 30): ἔνδον τοῦ κάστρου Ῥοσαφῶν μαρτύριον ἄξιον τῆς ὁμολογίας αὐτοῦ. On the Syrian and Armenian versions of the *Passio* and *Laudatio Sergii et Bacchi*, see *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (Brussels, 1910) 231. On the cult of St. Sergius in Syria and Mesopotamia, see Charles, *op. cit.*, 29–35. On Sts. Sergius and Resapha, see Musil, *Palmyrena*, Appendix VI, Historical Notes on Resafa, p. 260–272.

³² Procopius, *De aedificiis*, II, 9, 3–7; Dewing-Downey in *Loeb Library*, VII (1940) 156–157. The place of Sergiopolis was sometimes called Anastasiopolis. *Georgii Cyprii Descriptio Orbis Romani*, ed. H. Gelzer, p. 45 (884): Σεργιούπολις ἦτοι Ἀναστασιούπολις, ἡ σήμερον Ῥατταφά, ἐνθα ἐμαρτύρησεν ὁ ἅγιος Σέργιος. See E. Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches* (Brussels, 1935) 11; 16. On Resapha-Sergiopolis, see Victor Chapot, "Resapha-Sergiopolis," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, XXVII (1903) 280–291. Purely archaeological study; several pictures of the ruins of the sanctuary. See A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, I (Paris, 1946) 189: "The Martyrium of the great saint of North Mesopotamia, St. Sergius at Resafa-Sergiopolis (the seventh century) is a more complex edifice." On the architecture of the sanctuary see index in vol. II, under "Resafa-Sergiopolis" (p. 394), and "Serge, Saint" (p. 397).

³³ Procopius, *ibid.*; see also *De Bello Persico*, II, 29.

³⁴ *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor, V, 1, 7 (p. 189.2): ἡντιβόλει τὸν ἀοίδιμον ἐν μάρτυσι Σέργιον, δὲ καὶ τὰ νομαδικὰ πρᾶσθαι ἐθὺς εἰώθασιν. See also V, 13–14 (p. 212–216).

energy and vigor the servitude of the demon, go to the monument of the revered and honored martyrdom of Sergius," and accept the Christian faith.³⁵

Recently several archaeological studies on Sergiopolis have appeared. Particular attention has been paid to the structure outside the walls of the city, in which is preserved the Greek inscription with the name of Alamundaros, i.e. al-Mundhir, son of Djabala, the prince of the Ghassanid family. Most of the scholars have seen in this structure Alamundaros' church, but in 1939 the French orientalist, Sauvaget, came to the conclusion that this building, constructed on the same plan as the reception hall of officers of the imperial army, was actually the reception hall of the phylarch al-Mundhir. The title of patricius bestowed upon him by Justinian entirely justified the erection of such a building.³⁶

Surprisingly enough, in his famous *Pratum Spirituale* (Λειμωνάριον), John Moschus (about 540/550–619), who spent ten years at the lavra of Pharan, northeast of Jerusalem (568/569–578/579), and visited Palestine, Syria, and Sinai, fails to give us any factual information on Saracen incursions. He mentions Saracens several times, but always as individuals, in connection with the miracles performed by the anchorites.³⁷

³⁵ "Les *Homiliae Cathedrales* de Sévère d'Antioche," Traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse, publiée et traduite par R. Duval. Homélies LII–LVII, *Patrologia Orientalis*, IV (1906) 93. These homilies have not been preserved in Greek but only in Syriac translations.

³⁶ J. Sauvaget, "Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis," *Byzantion*, XIV (1939), 115–130; especially 120–121. See also A. Poidebard et R. Mousterde, "A propos de Saint Serge. Aviation et épigraphie," *Analecta Bollandiana*, LXVII. *Mélanges Paul Peeters*, I (1949) 109–116. For the scholars who considered the outside building to be a church, see, for instance, A. Musil, *Palmyrena* (New York, 1928), where, in the Appendix X, by A. Mendl, a reconstruction of Resafa is discussed, 299–326, especially 323.

³⁷ Since there is no critical edition of the *Pratum Spirituale*, I use the text published in Migne, *P.G.*, LXXXVII, pt. 3, 2851–3112.

In chapter 99 John Moschus relates the story of a certain monk Ianthos (Ἰανθος), who lived at Kothila (in the text ἐπὶ τὸν Κουτιλᾶν) in the desert of Judaea, south of the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. One day this same monk saw Saracens approaching. One of them unsheathed his sword in order to kill Ianthos, but the monk addressed a prayer to God, and immediately the earth opened and engulfed the Saracen.³⁸ In chapter 133 we read about a pagan Saracen who met a monk reading a book, and wished to harm him, or perhaps even to kill him. The monk stretched out his hand toward him, and the Saracen was immobilized for two days and two nights.³⁹ In chapter 136 we find the story of the anchorite Sisinnius who lived near the Jordan, and converted to a new life a Saracen prostitute who was a Christian.⁴⁰ Chapter 155 tells the story of the Abbot Nicholas who, at the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Maurice, when the Saracen phylarch Naaman (Ναμῆς) was ransacking the countryside, liberated a young captive from the hands of three Saracens. In the heat of the dispute over their captive the Saracens killed each other.⁴¹

However, the anonymous biographer of John Moschus tells us that when, in 619, his friend Sophronius brought the body of Moschus from Rome to Ascalon

Among our sources there are two biographical sketches of Moschus' life: one an anonymous *Elogium*, which has been published only in Latin, Migne, *P.L.*, LXXIV, 119–122, and the other in Photius' *Bibliotheca*, codex, 199, Migne, *P.G.*, CIII, 665–668. See S. Vailhé, "Jean Mosch," *Echos d'Orient*, V (1901), 107–116. D.-C. Hesselung, *Morceaux choisis du Pré Spirituel de Jean Moschos* (Paris, 1931) introduction, 1–13. M.-J. Rouët de Journal, S.J., *Jean Moschus. Le Pré Spirituel*, introduction et traduction (Paris, 1946) 7–12.

³⁸ *P.G.*, LXXXVII, 2957; Rouët de Journal, *op. cit.*, 146.

³⁹ *P.G.*, *ibid.*, 2996–7; Rouët de Journal, *op. cit.*, 184–5.

⁴⁰ *P.G.*, *ibid.*, 3000; Rouët de Journal, *op. cit.*, 187–8.

⁴¹ *P.G.*, *ibid.*, 3024; Rouët de Journal, *op. cit.*, 209–10.

in order to bury it at Sinai, in keeping with Moschus' wish, he could not reach that city, for the Saracens launched one of their incursions and blocked the way

⁴² *Cum autem ille (Sophronius) Ascalonem appulisset, et feri non posse didicisset, ut ad sanctum montem Sina perveniret, propter tyrannicas incursiones eorum qui vocantur*

to Sinai. Sophronius therefore brought the body to Jerusalem and buried it in the cemetery of the monastery of St. Theodosius.⁴²

Agareni, assumptis beati Joannis reliquiis, initio octavae indictionis Jerosolymam venit, et . . . in Sancti Theodostii coemeterio deposuit. Elogium, Migne, P.L., LXXIV, 121.